MAKE YOUR BUSINESS GROW. ADVERTISE IN DAWN INDUSTRY SUPPLEMENTS
Call Manager Supplements in Karachi Lahore or Islamabad on UAN: 111-444-777

DAWN

RAISE YOUR COMPANY'S PROFILE. ADVERTISE IN DAWN COUNTRY SUPPLEMENTS
Call Manager Supplements in Karachi Lahore or Islamabad on UAN: 111-444-777

Pak-US ties 'never looked so good' but need more substance

Georgetown symposium brings together Pakistani intellectuals to discuss foreign policy, economic challenges and opportunities

By Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: Relations between Pakistan and the United States have strengthened under the Trump administration but still hold potential for deeper engagement, according to Rizwan Shaikh, Pakistan's ambassador to the US.

Borrowing from President Donald Trump's vocabulary, he described the relationship as having "never been so good looking" in recent memory, while acknowledging that it still requires more substance.

The envoy was speaking at a symposium, organised by Pakistani students at Georgetown University, which covered a wide range of topics and featured several speakers from diverse backgrounds.

Most speakers attended the discussions in person, while some participated via video link.

Ambassador Robin Raphel, a former head of the State Department's Bureau of South Asian Affairs, said President Trump had removed the "emotionalism" that previously hindered US efforts to rebuild ties with Pakistan.

"Now is the time to strengthen the relationship with a country that remains strategically important," she added, pointing to Pakistan's proximity to some of the world's most sensitive regions.

Ambassador Shaikh also highlighted Pakistan's potential as "a large country with the fifth-largest population and many things to offer", adding that the Trump administration viewed Pakistan as a country with its own identity, rather than solely in reference to Afghanistan or India.

Former US ambassador Maleeha Lodhi outlined five key areas likely to dominate Pakistan's foreign policy in the years ahead.

These areas include managing relations with China and the United States amid the US-China confrontation, addressing challenges in Afghanistan, maintaining an adversarial stance towards India, and balancing ties between strategic ally Saudi Arabia and neighbour Iran.

She described the situation in Kabul as a major security and foreign policy challenge, calling it "a severe policy dilemma" for Islamabad.

"There are obvious limits to a coercive approach and military response, as a total breakdown in relations with Afghanistan is not in Pakistan's interest — especially given the already fraught ties with India," she said.

Former senator Mushahid Hussain reflected on Pakistan's evolving relationship with the US, urging Islamabad to leverage the current focus on economic and strategic engagement to rebuild its economy.

He emphasised Pakistan's role as a regional security provider in the Middle East, asserting that only a strong and stable Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, can bring lasting peace to the region. His remarks were met with warm applause from the audience.

Prof Akbar S. Ahmed highlighted the challenges in the country's tribal areas, praising the wisdom of local communities and warning about Balochistan, which makes up over 40 per cent of Pakistan's total area. He urged that the mistakes of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) should not be repeated.

He said no state can be sustained without justice, fairness and generosity. "We must consider the factors that truly support democracy," he added, stressing that a functioning democracy is impossible without education.

Other speakers highlighted the critical role of Pakistan's young population, with a median age of just 23, in shaping social and political movements.

Dr Mehlaqa Samdani, who leads a group lobbying for Mr Khan's release from prison, sought permission to address Ambassador Shaikh, but the session ended before she could speak.

WORKERS construct a concrete wall, part of which extends beyond the 'Blue Line', a UN-mapped line separating Lebanon from Israel and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.—Reuters

Facing backlash, Netanyahu says Israel opposed to Palestinian state

Israeli troops kill four Palestinians in Gaza, occupied West Bank

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday Israel remained opposed to a Palestinian state after protests by far-right coalition allies over a US-backed statement indicating support for a pathway to Palestinian independence.

Netanyahu spoke two days after Israel's key ally the United States and many Muslim-majority nations endorsed a draft UN resolution backing President Donald Trump's Gaza peace plan, saying the process offered a route to Palestinian statehood.

The 15-member UN Security Council began negotiations on Nov 7 on the draft, which would mandate Trump's proposal for a "Board of Peace" transitional administration in Gaza to address issues including post-war reconstruction and economic recovery.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military on Sunday killed four Palestinians, three in Gaza and one in the West Bank.

According to Al Jazeera, Israeli troops shot dead three Palestinians in southern Gaza while one Palestinian was killed in the West Bank city of Nablus on Sunday.

Trump's 20-point plan includes a clause saying that if there were reforms within the Palestinian Authority, "the conditions may finally be in place for a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood, which we recognise as the aspiration of the Palestinian people".

That point infuriated Israeli far-right leaders who had opposed the Trump-brokered October ceasefire in Gaza, testing Netanyahu's awkward governing coalition of conservatives and ultra-nationalists.

On Saturday far-right ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich called on Netanyahu to denounce the idea of a Palestinian state. Ben-Gvir threatened to leave the governing coalition if the prime minister did not act.

Netanyahu reiterates opposition to Palestine state

Netanyahu said in a statement on Sunday: "Our opposition to a Palestinian state in any territory has not changed. Gaza will be demilitarised and Hamas will be disarmed, the easy way or the hard way. I do not need affirmations, tweets or lectures from anyone." A far-right walkout could bring down Netanyahu's right-wing government well before the next election, which must be held by October 2026.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz and Foreign Minister Gideon Saar also issued statements on X against a Palestinian state on Sunday, without mentioning Netanyahu.

Trump's Gaza plan ended major fighting between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas after two years of war that devastated the Palestinian enclave and triggered spillover conflicts across the Middle East.

Netanyahu embraced Trump's plan during a visit to the White House in September but until Sunday had made no new statement on the Palestinian statehood issue.

Ahead of his White House visit, Netanyahu said he would respond to a number of major Western nations including France that formally recognised a Palestinian state in September, angering Israel, but has not followed up with any diplomatic actions.

Smotrich had on Saturday accused Netanyahu of failing to live up to his promise and called on him to formulate a response immediately: "Two months have passed in which you have chosen silence and political disgrace."

He urged Netanyahu to "make clear to the entire world (that) a Palestinian state will never arise on the lands of our homeland." Two years of intense Israeli bombardment and ground offensives in the Gaza Strip killed more than 69,000 people, according to local health authorities.— Agencies

Israeli forces fired on UN peacekeepers in Lebanon

Israel blames poor weather, says it mistook blue helmets for 'suspects'

BEIRUT: The UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon said Israeli soldiers shot at its troops on Sunday in the south of the country, which "represents a serious violation of UN Security Council resolution 1701", while Israel's military said it mistook blue helmets for 'suspects'.

The UNIFIL protested that Israeli forces "fired on UNIFIL peacekeepers from a Merkava tank from near a position Israel has established in Lebanese territory," adding that heavy machine gun rounds hit about five metres from their personnel.

Sunday's incident was not the first in which UNIFIL accused Israel of endangering its troops. "Yet again, we call on the IDF to cease any aggressive behaviour and attacks on or near peacekeepers," the force said.

Lebanon's army, meanwhile, accused Israel of "violating Lebanese sovereignty, causing instability and obstructing the full deployment of the army in the south".

The army is meant to deploy to the area alongside UNIFIL as part of the ceasefire agreement. It said it was "working, in coordination with friendly countries, to put and end to the continuous violations".

The UNIFIL said the peacekeepers this time managed to "leave safely 30 minutes later" after the tank withdrew inside the Israeli position.

However, the Israeli military blamed 'poor weather conditions' for the shooting.

Israel denied it had deliberately targeted UN troops. In a statement, the Israeli military said "two suspects were identified" in the El Hamames area of southern Lebanon.

"The troops subsequently fired warning shots, and the suspects distanced themselves. No injuries were reported," it said.

"After a review, it was determined that the suspects were UN soldiers who were conducting a patrol in the area and were classified as suspects due to poor weather conditions. No deliberate fire was directed toward UNIFIL soldiers."

UNIFIL has been working with the Lebanon to consolidate a truce between Israel and Hezbollah reached last year. It said the Sunday shooting "represents a serious violation of UN Security Council resolution 1701", which ended a 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, and also formed the basis of last November's truce.

Under the deal, Israel was to withdraw its forces from south Lebanon, but it has kept them at five areas in violation of the ceasefire agreement. It has also carried out regular strikes on targets in Lebanon.

About Sunday shooting, the Israeli military said the incident was under examination.—AFP

India arrests resident of held Kashmir over Delhi car blast

NEW DELHI: India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) said on Sunday that it had arrested a resident of occupied Kashmir in connection with a car blast that killed eight people and injured at least 20 others in Delhi last week.

The country's counter-terrorism law enforcement body further announced that the attack was carried out by a "suicide bomber," who it said was also from held Kashmir, where police have conducted sweeping raids in recent days.

Announcing "a breakthrough" in the investigation, the NIA said in a statement it had arrested Amir Rashid Ali, "in whose name the car involved in the attack was registered".

He had "conspired with the alleged suicide bomber, Umar Un Nabi, to unleash the terror attack", it added, without specifying any possible motive.

Nabi, a resident of held Kashmir, was an assistant professor in general medicine at a university in the northern state of Haryana, according to the counter-terrorism agency, which said it had seized a vehicle belonging to him.

Ali had come to Delhi to "facilitate the purchase of the car which was eventually used as a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (IED) to trigger the blast", the NIA said.

Delhi blast

The explosion on Monday took place near a busy metro station close to the landmark Red Fort in the capital's Old Delhi quarter, where the prime minister delivers the annual Independence Day address.

A hospital official has said the blast killed 12 people. It was unclear whether the toll included Nabi.

The NIA's statement said the attack "claimed 10 innocent lives and left 32 others injured".

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called the attack a "conspiracy", and his government vowed to bring the "perpetrators, their collaborators and their sponsors" to justice.

It was the most significant security incident since April 22, when 26 tourists were killed at a hill station in India-occupied Kashmir's Pahalgam, triggering clashes with Pakistan.

On Friday, nine people were killed when confiscated explosives blew up at a police station in occupied Kashmir, in what authorities said was an accident.

Local media reported that a militant organisation had claimed responsibility for it, which police dismissed.

The explosives had been recovered from Haryana state just before the powerful car blast in Delhi, according to the police.

Indian media have widely connected the Delhi blast with a string of arrests just hours prior.—Agencies

Strong action urged at COP30 to save glaciers

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has called for stronger international commitments to address the rapid decline of the Himalayan Karakoram Hindukush (HKH) mountain ranges, warning that the consequences of accelerated glacier melt are being felt across the region.

In a video message to a side event on Cryosphere Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction at the UN climate conference (COP30) in Belem, Brazil, Climate Minister Dr Musadik Malik described the HKH region as the white rooftops of the world and a lifeline for millions in South Asia.

Pakistan, he noted, is home to around 13,000 glaciers that feed the Indus River system and underpin the nation's food security, economy and ecosystems. Dr Malik said climate-driven glacier melt was proceeding at an unprecedented pace, leading to increasing hazards such as glacial lake outburst floods.

He also pointed to global inequities in climate finance, arguing that a handful of major emitters contributed most to global carbon pollution while also receiving the bulk of green financing. He urged countries with historic emissions responsibility to support adaptation efforts in vulnerable mountain regions and called for the cryosphere agenda to be elevated at COP30.

The session, organised by the climate ministry in partnership with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), also heard from officials representing Turkiye, Azerbaijan, Nepal, Bhutan and international bodies including Unesco, UNDP, and the Asian Development Bank.—APP

MINISTER for Climate Change Dr Musadik Masood Malik addresses 'Climate Finance Dialogue' via video link from Islamabad.—APP

Afghanistan seeks to cut economic dependence on Pakistan

• Kabul wants to bolster trade with C. Asia states • Afghan traders say Islamabad still shortest, cheapest route to seaports • Uzbek president proposes new bloc

Monitoring Desk/Agencies

AFGHANISTAN is seeking to significantly bolster trade with the oil-rich countries of Central Asia as it attempts to end its economic dependence on Pakistan, which has historically been Kabul's biggest trading partner.

However, experts warn that geography, high costs, and political constraints will hinder efforts by Afghanistan's cash-strapped and unrecognised Taliban government to shift trade to Central Asia, according to a *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* report.

Kabul's attempts to find new trade partners come after the worst outbreak of hostilities with Islamabad in years. The neighbours exchanged military attacks last month, killing dozens of people and leading to Pakistan closing its border with Afghanistan.

The month-long border closure has inflicted some $200 million in losses for Afghan traders, who rely on Pakistani seaports to access international markets.

Similarly, Pakistan had been exporting fresh fruits, cement, medicines, surgical items, agricultural tools, fabrics, shoes, plastic pipes and sanitary items, cosmetics, and a variety of other locally manufactured products valued at around $100–200m per month to the neighbouring country.

'Trade alternatives'

Senior Taliban officials have urged Afghan traders and investors to end their activities in Pakistan and find new business and trade opportunities in Central Asia. "We are actively working with our northern neighbors to find reliable trade alternatives," Taliban Commerce Minister Nooruddin Azizi said last week.

Abdul Ghani Baradar, a Taliban deputy prime minister, accused Islamabad of using trade as a "tool of political pressure" and framed the ongoing border closure as evidence that Kabul must reduce its reliance on its neighbour.

Swiss-based Afghan expert Torek Farhadi said the Taliban's new emphasis on trade with Central Asia is "largely political posturing".

Central Asia is landlocked, and Afghanistan must rely on long-distance overland corridors to reach markets. The region's tariff structures impose high costs on many Afghan exports, especially agricultural goods. The logistics of handling, storing, and transporting perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables remain underdeveloped.

"To make the northern route commercially viable, Afghanistan would need to remove tariffs and offer incentives to its Central Asian partners," Mr Farhadi told *RFE/RL*.

"But for the government in Kabul, customs revenue is one of their primary income sources."

Meanwhile, several railway projects, crucial for scaling cross-border trade, remain unfinished or lack financing.

The Taliban's lack of international recognition also prevents it from accessing funds from global institutions like the World Bank and IMF, limiting investment in the infrastructure needed to support northbound trade, Farhadi said.

Those factors have ensured that Afghanistan's trade with Central Asia, although growing, has remained modest.

Trade between Afghanistan and the five Central Asian states — Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan — has grown steadily, reaching nearly $1.7 billion, according to Afghan officials.

Still dependent

Despite Afghanistan's growing trade with Central Asia, Kabul remains dependent on Pakistan as Islamabad has long provided its neighbor with the fastest and most affordable access to global markets.

The border crossings at Torkham and Chaman remain the backbone of Afghanistan's commercial lifelines, but the repeated skirmishes in recent months caused frequent border closures. The most recent closures following armed clashes between Pakistani and Taliban forces left thousands of trucks stranded for weeks.

But for Afghan traders, few alternatives can match Pakistan's proximity or port infrastructure. Shifting trade away from those routes means higher transport costs, longer transit times, and increased logistical risks, experts say.

"The reality is that Afghanistan's shortest and cheapest route to seaports as well as India and other South Asian markets is through Pakistan," said Azarakhsh Hafizi, the former head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce.

"We need all transit routes to remain open. It would benefit not only Afghanistan and Pakistan, but it is also important for the regional economic integration," said Hafizi, who previously held membership in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Saarc.

Regional bloc proposed

Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed on Sunday forming a regional co-operation organisation he called the "Community of Central Asia", in what he said was a bid to promote economic integration in the region of more than 80 million people, *Reuters* reported.

In a speech at a meeting in Tashkent of the leaders of the five post-Soviet republics of Central Asia, as well as Azerbaijan, Mirziyoyev suggested transforming regular meetings between the leaders of the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia into a formal regional bloc.

He also stressed the need to boost economic, security and environmental cooperation.

There was no immediate indication of the other countries' response to the Uzbek proposal, but all five countries have in recent years said they want greater regional integration, where ties were sometimes testy in decades past.

All five leaders visited Washington in unison for talks with US President Donald Trump earlier this month.

Two of the countries, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, earlier this year settled a longstanding border conflict that had claimed hundreds of lives.

Printed at Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Khalil Mohsin and published for Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Shahjahan at Haroon House, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road, Karachi. EDITOR: ZAFFAR ABBAS